

The Tradition of Virgilian Travesty and Mock Epic

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Epic and humour are not natural bedfellows. And, while Ovid's own idiosyncratic brand of epic in the *Metamorphoses* certainly invites smiles and chuckles, and the grotesqueries of Lucan's epic on the *Civil War* have been read by some as comedy, there have been few attempts to diagnose a vein of comedy in Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹ There are no index entries for 'comedy' or 'humour' in either the first or the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*.²

Indeed, if one surveys Virgil's three major works, there is a decreasing amount of humour as we progress from the *Eclogues* to the *Aeneid*. As we move upwards through the *rota Vergiliana*, there is, unsurprisingly, an inverse relationship between the presence of humour and generic elevation.

It is easy to smile at the self-delusion of Corydon's unrequited love in *Eclogue 2*, and of the lovers of *Eclogues 8* and *10*, and at the aggressive banter of Menalcas and Damoetas in *Eclogue 3*. And there is perhaps something comic about the self-dyeing sheep of *Eclogue 4*, a poem which concludes with an invitation to smile, at line 60: *incipi, parue puer, risu cognoscere matrem*.

In the *Georgics* humour is generated by the grandiose treatment of lowly and small things, things associated with the soil, and creatures lower than the dignity of man.³ At 1.184–5 small pests are described as if they were earthborn Giants (*gegeneis*), *quae plurima terrae | monstra ferunt* ("monsters which the earth produces in large numbers"). This anticipates the sustained play on the incongruity between grand and small in the bees of *Georgic 4*, of which I shall say more later.

Coming to the *Aeneid*,⁴ forms of *rideo* uncompounded appear only thrice. Once it refers to the laughter, or smile, of Venus when she detects Juno in an attempt at deception (*dolis*

¹ See Wilner (1942); Macleod (1965) (referring to Richard [1951], which I have not seen); Lloyd (1977).

² Mac Góráin and Martindale (2019).

³ McCarter (2019) is an exercise in diagnosing a strong strain of humour in the *Georgics*.

⁴ Setting aside the debate over what Servius meant when he said of Book 4, *nam paene comicum stilum habet* ("for it has almost a comic style"): Anderson (1981) argues that Servius was misled by excessive dependence on his teacher Donatus' discussion of Terence.

risit Cytherea repertis: “Cytherea laughed/smiled at the discovery of her trickery”, 4.128), the laughter of Homeric gods in reaction to attempted deception.⁵ But the humour of the Virgilian gods, such as it is, is a much watered-down version of the ‘erhabene Unernst’ of the Homeric gods. Virgil’s conformity to a Hellenistic sense of epic decorum has the effect of eliminating much of what had come to be felt as incongruously comic or lowly in Homer. This decorum is relaxed in the relatively light-hearted games of *Aeneid* 5, where *rideo* occurs twice. The Trojans laugh at the helmsman Menoetes, unceremoniously pitched overboard by his impatient captain, and spewing up salt water: *illum et labentem Teucri et risere natantem | et salsos rident reuomentem pectore fluctus* (“At him as he slipped and swam the Trojans laughed; and they laugh as he spews up salt waves from his chest”, 5.181–2). Here *rideo* takes an accusative object (“laugh at”). *rideo* takes a dative object when Aeneas “smiles at”⁶ Nisus when he demands a prize, his face and limbs smeared in the dung in which he had slipped and fallen in the foot-race: *et simul his dictis faciem ostentabat et udo | turpia membra fimo. risit pater optimus olli | et clipeum efferri iussit* (“And as he said this he displayed his face and limbs, befouled with moist dung; the excellent father smiled at him and ordered a shield to be brought out”, 5.357–9). In a bold elision of low and high, the ridiculous and the sublime, this is at once a smile provoked by Nisus’ laughable appearance, but also a smile that identifies Aeneas with the supreme god Jupiter, who smiles (*olli subridens*) at two critical points where he administers the course of Fate (1.254, at Venus; 12.829, at Juno).⁷ The small example of scatological humour in *Aeneid* 5 will be the starting-point for something much less restrained in the games of writers and booksellers in Pope’s *Dunciad*.

Of course, the more serious and pretentious a genre, the more it invites mockery and deflation. In the paratragedy of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, the lofty and grand Aeschylus is a more straightforward target for parody than is Euripides. From a very early date tragedy has its comic *alter ego* embedded institutionally, in the form of the satyr play. Epic, which shares a place with tragedy at the summit of the hierarchy of genres, is also accompanied by parody from a very early date. The eponymous hero of the *Margites*, of the seventh or sixth century BC, was a moron who did not know whether his mother or his father had given birth to him, and who did not know what to do on his wedding night.

To return to *Georgics* 4, Joe Farrell’s classic book on the *Georgics* (1991) reads the poem as progressing through the different kinds of didactic hexameter epos, to sustained

⁵ Halliwell (2008) 66.

⁶ *OLD rideo* 2; Uden (2014) 72 n. 4.

⁷ The argument that Aeneas’ smile in Book 5 identifies him in a Jovian role is convincingly made by Uden (2014), who also shows that the two other instances of *subrideo* in the *Aeneid* occur at moments when enemies of Aeneas mistakenly assume a Jovian role: 9.740 (Turnus), 10.742 (Mezentius). On smiles in the *Aeneid*, see also De Saint-Denis (1964); Konstan (1986); Newman (1988).

engagement with Homer in Book 4, in preparation for the epic flight of the *Aeneid*. In the Aristaeus epyllion that concludes the book there is close and extended imitation of Homer, first in the narrative of Aristaeus' complaint to Cyrene, based on Achilles' complaint to his mother Thetis in the *Iliad*, and then in Aristaeus' capture of Proteus in order to force him to reveal the reason for the loss of his bees, based on Menelaus' capture of Proteus to tell him of the fate of the other Greeks after the fall of Troy, and of his own future, in *Odyssey* 4 (351–570). This is a good example of how Virgil sanitises an indecorous, and potentially comic, Homeric model, since he cuts out the detail of the foul smell of the seal-skins in which Menelaus and his companions disguise themselves in order to sneak up on Proteus.

But before we reach these warming-up exercises for the full-scale epic to follow, we have had a complete, if appropriately miniature, episode of mock heroic in the battle of the bees near the beginning of *Georgics* 4 (lines 67–87). As a narrative of grand epic battle waged by very small creatures, the battle of the bees is comparable to the *Batrachomyomachia*, the war of the frogs and the mice (of uncertain date); and the great-hearted heroics of a small insect are the subject of the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*, the “Gnat”. In terms of the Virgilian career, it is noteworthy that Virgil gives a specimen of mock heroic before turning to write the full-scale Homeric epic that is the *Aeneid*. It is probably coincidental that in the prefatory essay to Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*, the fictional Martinus Scriblerus was to assert, with reference to the *Margites*, that “it doth appear, that the first Dunciad was the first Epic poem, written by Homer himself, and anterior even to the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*”.⁸

The contrast in the battle of the bees between large and small, momentous and trivial, serious and unserious, is a defining feature of both mock heroic and travesty. Virgil twice draws attention explicitly to the contrast of large and small at the end of the battle of the bees: *ingentis animos angusto in pectore uersant* (“They stir great passions in a narrow breast”, 4.83); *hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta | pulueris exigui iactu compressa quiescent* (“These turmoils of the spirit and these great contests will fall quiet when suppressed by throwing a little dust at them”, 4.86–7). These contrasts pick up the programmatic statement at the beginning of Book 4, *in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem | numina laeua sinunt auditque uocatus Apollo* (“I labour at a slender subject; but not slender is the glory, if the adverse powers permit one, and Apollo listens to prayers”, 4.6–7). The Callimachean contrast between *tenuis* (“slender”) and *non tenuis* (“not slender”) is also the contrast that structures mock epic. This is recognised by Pope in his imitation of Virgil's programmatic words, in the prologue to *The Rape of the Lock* 1.5–6: “Slight is the subject, but not so the praise, | If She inspire, and He approve my lays”.

⁸ Rumbold (2009) 70.

One last point to note, in light of the subjects of some of the most significant early modern examples of mock heroic, is that the battle of the bees hints strongly at the historical civil wars of first-century BC Rome. *Discordia* is the word used of the “strife” between the two kings (4.68), a word that is not restricted to civil strife, but which often has that connotation, particularly in Virgil. Mynors in his commentary indeed labels the battle of the bees “Civil War”.⁹ The passage immediately following the battle of the bees, on the need to kill the inferior of the two bee-kings, once their battle has been quelled by throwing at it a handful of dust, has often been read as an allegory on Octavian and Antony. Mock heroic is one way of making speakable the unspeakable subject of civil war. In the *Aeneid* Virgil will use other forms of indirection to talk of civil war.

In the rest of my lecture I will look at the tradition of parodies of the *Aeneid*. This is a long tradition, and an important part of the reception of the *Aeneid*. Again, I note that in the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* there are no index entries for mock heroic (or mock epic), or travesty, despite the fact that eight of the twenty-six chapters in the *Companion* are on the reception of Virgil. A travesty of Virgil can even claim to be the foundational work of a national literature: Ivan Kotlyarevsky’s travesty the *Eneida* (written in 1798, published in 1842) was the first work written wholly in Ukrainian, and marks Kotlyarevsky as the father of Ukrainian literature.¹⁰ Kotlyarevsky transforms the Trojans into the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

I will look at two segments of the parodic reception of the *Aeneid*: firstly the European-wide fashion for travesties of the *Aeneid* in the seventeenth century, and secondly the vogue in France and England for mock heroic poetry, in the late seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. First, some brief definitions. A travesty is the clothing of the lofty matter of an epic in low manners and low language; ‘travesty’ is, etymologically, a cross-dressing or disguise. Mock heroic, or mock epic,¹¹ is the application of the lofty generic features of epic to undignified or trivial subject matter. What travesty and mock heroic share is an incongruity between form and matter, a deliberate infringement of decorum, in French a ‘disconvenance’; what divides them is given lapidary expression in Charles Perrault’s distinction between the two, “disconvenance en deux manières, l’une en parlant basement des choses les plus relevées, et l’autre en parlant magnifiquement des choses les plus basses” (“incongruity of two kinds, the one speaking in low terms of the most exalted things, and the other speaking in grand terms of the lowliest things”).¹²

⁹ Mynors (1990) 268.

¹⁰ Kotlyarevsky (2004).

¹¹ ‘Mock heroic’ and ‘mock epic’ may be used interchangeably, but Robertson (2009) would make a distinction between the two: see n. 42.

¹² Perrault (1692) iii.296.

In France and England, the fashion for mock heroic follows, and is responsible for eclipsing, the fashion for travesty. The key document in the history of mock heroic is Boileau's *Le Lutrin* ("The lectern") of 1674. In his preface "Au lecteur", Boileau presents *Le Lutrin* as a new kind of burlesque, in contrast to the "burlesque" that is the travesty: "C'est un burlesque nouveau, dont je me suis avisé en notre langue: car, au lieu que dans l'autre burlesque, Didon et Enée parlaient comme des harengères et des crocheteurs, dans celui-ci une horlogère et un horloger parlent comme Didon et Enée" ("It is a new kind of burlesque on which I have ventured in our language; for, while in the other kind of burlesque, Dido and Aeneas speak like fishwives and picklocks, in this a clockmaker and her husband speak like Dido and Aeneas"). Boileau criticises travesty in his Horatianising *Art poétique*, also published in 1674: "Le Parnase parla le langage des Hales" (1.84), in Dryden's translation "Parnassus spoke the cant of Billingsgate".

Fashions have their own momentum, but it is always worth asking what factors external to the self-perpetuating impetus of a fashion encourage its emergence and continuation. Various answers have been suggested to this question in the cases of both travesty and mock heroic, that have to do with social and political determinants, and with the trajectory of the millennia-long history of the genre of epic.

The first point to be made is that, as parodistic responses to epic, neither travesty nor mock heroic need imply a dismissive disrespect for epic as a genre.¹³ Parody, as we all know, is a form of allusion or intertextuality, or what Gérard Genette calls "palimpsest", that may be as respectful of that which is mocked as are other forms of intertextuality or reworkings. These kinds of parasitism, if one may use the image, flourish only so long as the hosts on which they are parasitic are in – at least relatively – vigorous health. As Claude Rawson puts it, "If the epic ceases to matter, the ground for serious mock-heroic disappears".¹⁴

At the same time, it may be true that travesty and mock heroic are symptoms of a growing unease with the dominant position of epic in the literary system, under stress from changes in readerships, and from evolutions in social and moral values. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are a period in which epic is being displaced from its primacy as a literary form, however much reports of its death may be greatly exaggerated. In particular, this is the time when the novel was beginning to take over from the epic as the dominant long narrative form. In England, the greatest classicising epic, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, published in its twelve-book form in 1674, both marks a *ne plus ultra* of the genre, and already contains within itself both far-reaching critiques of epic, and a

¹³ See Warburton's note on *Dunciad* 2.405: "...the ridicule falls not on the thing *imitated*, but *imitating*": "Warburton sets out the standard account of such parodic genres as mock epic" (Rumbold [2009] 209).

¹⁴ Rawson (2010) 181.

large-scale specimen of what is often read as a parody of martial epic, in the war in heaven (Book 6), a war that is hyperbolic but inconsequential, because of the invulnerability of its combatants – inconsequential until the point at which the Son, riding alone in the chariot of the Father, plunges the rebel angels into the bottomless pit. The central action of *Paradise Lost* is the domestic story of a married couple, Adam and Eve, precursor of the domestic narratives of the eighteenth-century novel. The most enduring products of the epic genre in England in the sixty or so years after *Paradise Lost* are not independent new poems (although there was no shortage of such), but derivative, in different ways: firstly, translations, Dryden's *Aeneid* and Pope's *Iliad*, both masterpieces of English poetry in their own right; and, secondly, mock heroic, of which the outstanding examples are Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*.

Another point to note about the propagation of both travesty and mock heroic is the easy crossing of national and linguistic boundaries, not a causal, but a facilitating, determinant. Travesty starts off in Italy, and migrates to France, and thence to England. Boileau's *Le Lutrin* prompts imitations and translations in England, including the homage paid to Boileau by Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*. The traffic was two-way: *The Rape of the Lock* was translated into French prose in 1728, into Italian verse, as *Il riccio rapito*, in 1739, into German verse in 1744 and into Dutch prose in 1772.¹⁵ Literary fashion was as international in early modern Europe as perhaps only fashions in clothing and accessories are in the modern world.

Boileau's *Le Lutrin* and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad* have stood the test of time and achieved the status of classics. The same is not true of the travesties of the *Aeneid*. Genette, in his acute analysis of travesty in *Palimpsests*,¹⁶ thinks that the ephemerality of travesty is due to the fact that it brings epic up to date, and so fades with its topicality. This cannot be the whole story, since mock heroic also applies the hallowed forms of epic to the contemporary, and usually trivial: *Le Lutrin* takes off from a dispute between the treasurer and precentor of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris; Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* from a dispute between the Royal College of Physicians and the Company of Apothecaries; and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* from Lord Petre's cutting off of a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair, while *The Dunciad* satirises the literary scene of Pope's own day.

In what follows, I will proceed chronologically. I will start with the travesty, which is wholly dependent on the *Aeneid*, and then move on to mock heroic.¹⁷ Mock heroic deploys the

¹⁵ Information in Tillotson (1954) 105.

¹⁶ Genette (1997) 56–65.

¹⁷ Jump (1972) includes surveys of both travesty and mock heroic.

themes, forms and language of epic, writing to a recipe that need not constantly allude to specific models or intertexts, but Virgil is inevitably a major presence. I shall focus on those aspects and episodes of mock heroic that do acknowledge the Virgilian model.

The label ‘travesty’ derives from the first such exercise, Giambattista Lalli’s (1572–1637) *L’Eneide travestita* (1634).¹⁸ Lalli presents his work as a continuation of the task of translating the *Aeneid*, in his “To the reader” [“Al lettore”]. He says that the *Aeneid* had already been translated (“tradotto”) “in lingua toscana”, partly in ottava rima, partly in verso sciolto (blank verse); it would have done an injustice to the poem not to translate it (“tradurlo”) also “into a delightful and playful style, so that the taste for it might be more universal, and so that everyone could find suitable relief in the hours of taking breath from serious business” (“in dilettevole stile giocoso, affinché il gusto fosse più universale, e potesse ciascuno, nell’ora di respirare dalle gravi occupazioni, prendere opportuno sollevamento”). The claim is that this kind of “translation” will win a wider readership for Virgil’s epic. However, Lalli continues, he was concerned that he might cheapen (“avvilito”) the majesty of the epic language, “and it might seem that this incomparable author, previously clothed in gold, should wish to be disguised (*travestir*) in poor and coarse rags” (“e pareva che quell’ incomparabile autore già vestito d’oro, di poveri e ruvidi panni travestir si volesse”). Nevertheless, one day, bored of more serious occupations, he says, I hastily translated four octaves, and was encouraged, and finally prevailed upon, by friends to continue, finishing the job in eight months – so displacing the responsibility for cheapening Virgil on to others. The use of low and vulgar words might occasionally give rise to “il grazioso”, “prettiness”; maxims (“motti”) and proverbs, and less noble and uncivil (“poco civili”) words, are a route to the generation of wit and laughter (“l’arguzia e il riso”). Returning to the topic of translation, Lalli says that his is not a word for word “volgarizzamento” of the poem, but “in the manner of paraphrase” (“con modo parafrastico”). “Virgil’s famous work, like gold wrapped in rags, will never lose its perfection as a result” (“L’opera famosa di Virgilio, come oro ravvolto negli stracci, non perderà per questo mai la sua perfezione”). Finally, Lalli situates his work within classical contexts: he has aimed to produce something in jest and in a playful style, to avoid the criticism directed at Homer for writing his *Batrachomyomachia* “in too harmonious a manner” (“troppo armoniosamente”). Lalli thus anticipates the distinction made by Boileau and Perrault between the burlesque of travesty and the burlesque of mock heroic. Rather, Lalli hopes that he will achieve what Pliny the Younger claimed could be achieved by the production of playful light verse in the intervals of relaxing from more serious literary endeavours: “these things are called trifles (*lusus*); but these trifles sometimes win no less

¹⁸ I have used the text in Lalli (1822) (accessible on Google Books). On Lalli and Scarron see Stackelberg (1982).

glory than serious compositions” (*lusus uocantur; mihi [sed hi] lusus non minorem interdum gloriam, quam seria consequuntur*, Pliny, *Ep.* 7.9.10).¹⁹

To give the flavour, I offer two samples of Lalli’s travesty. Firstly, the Prologue:

Io canto l’arme, e ’l bravo Capitano,
 D’una Troja figliuol, che al Tebbro venne;
 E per terra e per mar con tempo strano,
 Fortune del gran diavolo sostenne:
 Gli fe’ Giunone più d’un sopra mano;
 Portò i suoi Dei nel sacco, e gli mantenne:
 I suoi fondaro, a rischio de le coste,
 Roma, e fornilla poi di calde arrostè.

I sing the arms and the good captain, son of a sow/whore/Troy, who came to the Tiber, and, on land and sea, in difficult weather, endured the fortunes/storms of the great devil. Juno gave him more than one blow from above; he carried his gods in his bag, and kept them safe. Risking their ribs, his men founded Rome, and then supplied it with hot chestnuts.

Secondly, the end of the interview in Book 1 between Aeneas and his disguised mother, at the point where Venus reveals her true self as she leaves her son (*Aen.* 1.402–9):

Così diss’ ella, e a un tratto indi sparita
 Di faville e d’ ambrosia empì la terra;
 E mandò al naso tali odori e tanti,
 Quanti n’ ha seco un profumier di guanti.

Enea, come un fanciul, che tiene in mano
 Stretto un augel, che nel più bel gli scappa,
 Segue pur lei con l’ occhio di lontano;
 Ma faccia quanto vuol, non la richiappa:
 E grida, ah madre, ah con che modo strano
 Queste beffe mi fai sotto la cappa?

¹⁹ Pliny here perhaps remembers the words of Virgil at the beginning of the fourth *Georgic* (*in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria ...*, 4.6–7), which is certainly echoed at Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.32.3, *nobis in arto et inglorius labor*.

Perchè non mostri al figlio il volto istesso,
E toccarti la man non mè concesso?

So she spoke, and, suddenly disappearing, she filled the earth with sparks and ambrosia, and wafted to the nose such and so many odours as a perfumer of gloves has in store. Aeneas, like a child who holds a bird tightly in his hand, which escapes from him just at the best moment, nonetheless follows her with his eye at a distance, but, do as he will, cannot grab her again; and shouts, “Ah, mother, why do you play these pranks on me under the cloak? Why do you not show your son your true face, and why am I not allowed to touch your hand?”

Lalli was followed in France in the next decade by Paul Scarron’s wildly successful *Le Virgile travesti*, which, between 1648 and 1653, Scarron carried through as far as Book 8 of the *Aeneid*.²⁰ Scarron’s title *Le Virgile travesti* declares that his is a re-clothing of Lalli’s *L’Eneide travestita* in a French translation, with the slight swerve from “*L’Eneide*” to “*Virgile*”. Scarron establishes his independence from Lalli by what might be described as a hypercharacterisation of Lalli’s distortion of the Virgilian text. Lalli’s ottava rima is replaced by the octosyllabic ‘vers burlesque’, marked as ‘low’ in distinction to the alexandrines of French epic. The low humour is intensified. A nineteenth-century scholar noted that Lalli lowered Virgil by a couple of tones, Scarron by several octaves.²¹ There is an increased concentration on the body and on food, a Rabelaisian carnivalesque, with a liking for long lists. Even allowing for the greater length of the hexameter compared to the octosyllable, there is an enormous expansion of the bulk of the Latin original: Scarron’s Book 4, for example, comes to 3030 lines, in comparison to Virgil’s 705 lines. Epic objectivity is shattered through the frequent use of anachronism, eliding the distance between the epic legendary past and the familiar present day, and through the constant intrusion of the writer’s first person, providing what sometimes amounts to a running commentary on his handling of the narrative, in which the “je” of Scarron elbows out the reticent *ego* of the original author, who becomes the source of information for the author of the travesty (“messire Maron ...”: “Master Virgil tells us ...”). “Je” is indeed the first word of *Le Virgile travesti*, in a rewriting of the *Ille ego* proem, which gives a first sampling of the profound difference of tone that separates the travesty from its original:

²⁰ Text: Serroy (1988), with systematic bibliography.

²¹ Morillot (1888) 192–3.

Je, qui chantai jadis Typhon,
 D'un style qu'on trouva bouffon,
 Aujourd'hui, de ce style même,
 Encor qu'en mon visage blême,
 Chacun ait raison de douter 5
 Si je pourrai m'en acquitter,
 Devant que la mort qui tout mine,
 Me donne en proie à la vermine,
 Je chante cet homme pieux,
 Qui vint, chargé de tous ses dieux 10
 Et de Monsieur son père Anchise,
 Beau vieillard à la barbe grise,
 Depuis la ville où les Grégeois
 Occirent tant de bons bourgeois,
 Jusqu'à celle où le pauvre Rème 15
 Fut tué par son frère même,
 Pour avoir, en sautant, passé
 De l'autre côté d'un fossé.

I, who whilom sung of Typhon, in a style thought to be farcical, today, in the same style – although from my pale complexion, anyone might have reason to doubt that I could finish the task before death, which destroys everything, gives me as prey for the worms – I sing this pious man, who came, loaded with all his gods, and with monsieur his father Anchises, a fine old man with a grey beard, from the town where the Greeks killed so many good burghers, to the town where poor Remus was killed by his own brother, because, taking a jump, he had crossed from the other side of a ditch.

In his dedication “À la reine” (Anne of Austria, the Queen Mother, and regent from 1643 to 1651, during the minority of her son, Louis XIV) Scarron styles himself as a “humble petit faiseur de vers burlesques” (“humble little maker of burlesque verses”). His stated aim is similar to that of Lalli, to raise an occasional laugh, and to give pleasure, but he also draws attention to the lofty status of his addressee: “And why should my book not please her, since the most insignificant monkey can sometimes amuse the spirits of the loftiest circles?” (“Et pourquoi ne lui plaira-t-il pas, puisque la moindre guenon peut quelquefois divertir l'esprit du monde le plus relevé?”). A “guenon” literally means a female monkey, and colloquially an

ugly (old) woman. Scarron alludes in jest to his own physical deformity, an arthritis-ridden dwarf. The social and physical distance between writer and addressee mirrors the ‘disconvenance’ between high and low that defines the travesty: the lowest touching the highest, the queen condescending to the gutter. Scarron stands to his patron in the same relationship as travesty to epic. But, a cat may look at a queen. The image of a monkey perhaps also alludes to the way that Scarron apes the *Aeneid*. For a much earlier example of simian parody of a Virgilian image one might compare the Pompeian wall-painting of the group of Aeneas, Anchises and Ascanius fleeing from Troy, in the shape of dog-headed apes.²²

I don’t know whether we have any evidence that the queen enjoyed *Le Virgile travesti*. Genette talks of the “lower-middle-class public of *Virgile travesti*”, for whom epic, distanced by grandeur and time, is “familiarized” by burlesque trivialisation. I suspect this is only part of the story: *Le Virgile travesti* was a runaway success, and established a wider fashion for burlesque and travesty, that was surely enjoyed by the upper-class and well-educated, as well as by the *petite bourgeoisie*. More plausibly it has been claimed that the success of *Le Virgile travesti* is partly to be explained by the fact that it coincided with the rise of the novel in France. This was a time when the *roman épique* was in the ascendant over the *roman comique*. The *roman épique* was also the target of Scarron’s burlesque, in sympathy with the realism of the comic novel. Tiring of *Le Virgile travesti*, which he abandoned before completing Book 8, he turned to *Le Roman comique* (1651–7), the history of a troupe of strolling actors. The birth of the realistic novel thus owes something to the travesty of epic.

It has also been claimed that the iconoclastic disrespect displayed by *Le Virgile travesti* mirrors the political conditions of the time in which it was produced, a period of crisis of authority; the years of its publication coincide exactly with the period of the Fronde, the civil wars of 1648–53 in which Louis XIV faced the opposition of the French princes, nobility and people. This is perhaps too easy an equation, belied, it would seem, by Scarron’s dedication of the work to the Queen Mother. A further counter-argument might be drawn from the political conditions in England at the time of the publication of the most successful of the English travesties of Virgil, Charles Cotton’s *Scarronides*, a travesty of Books 1 and 4 of the *Aeneid*, published respectively in 1664 and 1665, a few years after the restoration of the monarchy.²³ It would be easy to see *Scarronides* as an expression of the exuberant spirits of the Restoration, continuing in English a fashion with which the English court had come into contact while in exile in France, at a time when Scarron’s popularity was at its height. Things may be more complicated, since there was also a pre-existing English tradition of

²² Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 9089; discussed by Clarke (2007) 151–7, with plate 16.

²³ Modern critical edition: Dust (1992).

‘drollery’ that mixed scatology with classical works, going back to the 1650s, in part an expression of protest against the humourlessness of Puritanism. Closely related to travesty is another very popular work of the time, Samuel Butler’s satirical epic *Hudibras*, published from 1662 onwards, a polemic against Roundheads, Puritans and Presbyterians.

Scarron’s title declared his dependence on Lalli; Cotton’s title *Scarronides* declares him to be the “son of Scarron”.²⁴ Succession is one, central, epic theme that the writers of travesty seem to take seriously. *Scarronides* owes much to *Le Virgile travesti*, but is far from being merely a translation into English. Cotton in fact departs much further from the Virgilian text than either his Italian or French predecessor. Some passages are omitted entirely, or replaced with something different. For example, the famous wounded deer simile of Dido’s love in Book 4 is replaced with a comparison to a heifer stung by a gadfly. This is claimed as autopsy (“So have I seen in pastures fair”, 179), but owes more to Virgil’s description of the gadfly in *Georgics* 3, redirected by Cotton to a crudely physical description of the sex-crazed Dido: “An heifer young when she doth itch, | With gad-breeze sticking in her breech” (181–2). A few lines earlier, Virgil’s *est mollis flamma medullas* (“the flame eats at her soft marrow”, *Aen.* 4.66) has become “Dido for love in woeful wise, | Bubbles and boils, and broils and fries” (173–4). Scatology and sex, whether explicit or by innuendo, play a major role in lowering the tone through reference to bodily functions, particularly in Book 4. The social status of the characters is also brought down. Dido has a dairy in Carthage. When Mercury comes down to tell Aeneas to leave Carthage, Aeneas’ city-founding has been reduced to “building for the queen a jakes” (664), quarreling with the carpenters who “would not follow his advice | (As workmen still are over-wise) | Which made him foam, and flirt out spittle, | Because they made the holes too little” (641–4). Smutty English humour has perhaps not changed much over the centuries.

The line of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mock heroic²⁵ begins, as I have said, with Boileau’s *Le Lutrin* (published 1674).²⁶ The great motions of epic are played out in Paris within the urban institutions of the church and the lawcourts. The *casus belli* is a reading desk in the Sainte-Chapelle, placed in storage many years ago, and which the treasurer²⁷ plots to reinstall at night in order to spite the precentor, who has been giving himself airs by dispensing blessings in the chapel. After the reading desk has been installed and then removed again by the supporters of the precentor, the dispute is taken to the lawcourt, where the two

²⁴ On Scarron and English travesty see Leavitt (1919).

²⁵ On mock heroic see Terry (2005); Robertson (2009) ch. 2.

²⁶ Boileau Despréaux (1674), published together with *L’Art poétique*.

²⁷ Previously Bishop of Coutances.

This starts with *Arma uirumque cano*, “Je chante les combats, et ce prélat terrible”, and ends with *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* in “Tant de fiel entre-t-il dans l’âme des dévots!” (“Does so much bile enter the souls of the devout?”). The (free and expanded) English translation (1708) by John Ozell makes the Virgilian model even clearer: “Arms and the priest I sing, whose martial soul | No toil could terrify, no fear control ...”. The overall shape of the plot is also ultimately Virgilian, a conflict between the personifications of Discord and Piety, or, to put it in Virgilian terms, a conflict between lower-case *furor* and *pietas*. The actions of the personification of Discord mirror closely those of Juno and her agent the Fury Allecto in the *Aeneid*. For example, Discord’s indignant speech at the beginning, when she sees that the Sainte-Chapelle alone, amidst her empire of tumultuous disorder, enjoys a state of fraternal peace, echoes the indignant speeches of Juno that motivate the action of the *Aeneid* in Books 1 and 7. The abstraction of the Virgilian plot into an opposition of personifications is in the line of a long tradition of post-Virgilian epic, in which Statius’ *Thebaid* and the panegyric epics of Claudian play an important part. The war in Latium triggered by Juno and Allecto in the second half of the *Aeneid* is partly in the image of much more recent social and civil wars in Roman history, and the conflict in *Le Lutrin* is a kind of civil war, disrupting the initial “paix fraternelle”.

It is also a civilian war, in which no serious injuries are inflicted and no one gets killed. Claude Rawson notes that “the formula of the battle without killing becomes an essential pattern of the mock-heroic canon”;²⁸ in an English context Rawson notes the importance of Milton’s war in heaven, in which no one gets killed because all the participants were angels, and so “incapable of mortal injury | Imperishable” (*PL* 6.434–5). The books hurled as weapons in Canto 5 of *Le Lutrin* inflict injuries allegorical of their contents. Ozell substitutes English titles for Boileau’s French: “Some luckless hand a Beaumont’s *Psyche* throws | At Clotho’s head, and smote him ’twixt the brows; | When, strange effect! the brawny priest began | To yawn and stretch; lethargic stiffness ran | Thro’ all the magazines of vital heat; | The veins no more life’s quickening task repeat; | The soporiferous rhymes benumbed his breast, | And with strong opiates forced him down to rest”. Foxe’s weighty *Book of Martyrs*, however, does draw “streams of blood”, being, as it is, “a folio swoll’n with floods of gore”.

Boileau incorporates an amatory element in his ecclesiastical and legal satire, in the person of the wife of the treasurer’s wig-maker, one of his supporters who have been chosen by lot to venture on their night-raid on the Sainte-Chapelle. The monster Renommée (Virgil’s *Fama*) brings news to her that her husband is abandoning her bed,

²⁸ Rawson (2010) 171.

at which she launches into a version of Dido's recriminations to Aeneas, beginning (2.12–22):

“Oses-tu bien encor, traître, dissimuler?”
 Dit-elle; “et ni la foi que ta main m’a donnée,
 Ni nos embrassemens qu’a suivis l’hyménée,
 Ni ton épouse enfin, toute prête à périr, 15
 Ne sauroient donc t’ôter cette ardeur de courir!
 Perfide! si du moins, à ton devoir fidèle,
 Tu veillois pour orner quelque tête nouvelle,
 L’espoir d’un juste gain, consolant ma langueur,
 Pourroit de ton absence adoucir la longueur. 20
 Mais quel zèle indiscret, quel aveugle entreprise
 Arme aujourd’hui ton bras en faveur d’une église?”

And would'st thou hide this mischief of thy mind?
 And can nor sacred vows, nor duty bind?
 Dar'st thou then, traitor, so perfidious prove
 To plighted Faith, and hymeneal Love?
 Are all th' endearments of a wedded life,
 The soft embraces of a tender wife,
 (A wife alas! just ready to expire)
 Too weak to conquer one unkind desire?
 False man, wert thou obliged to wear away
 The tedious hours from eve to dawning day;
 With well-formed curls, or with dissembled hair,
 The beau to furnish, or adorn the fair:
 I could, perhaps, without regret or pain,
 The want of due benevolence sustain;
 Thy absence sweetened with the hopes of gain.
 But thus to leave your partner in the lurch,
 With a mad zeal in favour of a church?

It would be a different matter, she complains, if the wig-maker was, in Ozell's expansion of Boileau's French, “obliged to wear away | The tedious hours from eve to dawning day; | With well-formed curls, or with dissembled hair, | The beau to furnish, or adorn the fair”. Was this

one of the things in Pope's mind when he chose to write a mock epic on *The Rape of the Lock*, one of whose classical models was the Callimachean and Catullan "The lock of Berenice", a poem that feeds into Virgil's tragedy of Dido in more than one passage of the *Aeneid*?²⁹

Boileau's *Le Lutrin* was certainly the primary model for Samuel Garth's (1661–1719) *The Dispensary*, also in six cantos, of 1699.³⁰ The poem enjoyed great success: three editions were published in 1699, and eight in all during Garth's lifetime (with successive revisions and additions). Like *Le Lutrin*, *The Dispensary* elevates a professional quarrel into a full-scale epic narrative. The quarrel was between the Royal College of Physicians, of which Garth was a member, and the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries; the occasion was the building of a medical dispensary for the poor at the Royal College, which the Society of Apothecaries took as a threat to its interests. This is another kind of civil war, whose overall trajectory, as laid out in the brief prologue, is similar to that of *Le Lutrin* (1.1–6):

Speak, Goddess! since 'tis thou that best canst tell,
 How ancient leagues to modern discord fell;
 And why physicians were so cautious grown
 Of others' lives, and lavish of their own;
 How by a journey to th' Elysian Plain 5
 Peace triumphed, and old time returned again.

Garth's Canto 6, like Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, relates a journey to the Underworld. The goddess of Health, Hygeia, guides one of the physicians, Celsus, beneath the earth, through a subterranean topography which filters the Virgilian katabasis through the excavation of a Virgilian tradition of epic and didactic that tracks through Girolamo Fracastoro, like Garth a physician-poet, the author of the *Syphilis*, Abraham Cowley, and Milton, to arrive at the Elysian Fields. There the shade of William Harvey gives advice on "How her lost health your science may regain" (6.334), referring the Royal Society of Physicians to their Visitor, the orator and statesman 'Atticus', a mask for the chancellor Lord Somers, as the renowned jurist Guillaume de Lamoignon restores peace at the end of *Le Lutrin*.

The poem ends in decidedly non-mock heroic mode, with panegyric that alludes to Anchises' praise of Augustus, the climax of the Virgilian Parade of Heroes: once the College of Physicians has had its wounds healed by 'Atticus', "Then Nassau's Health shall be your

²⁹ Mason (1969/70) analyses the effect of Boileau's filtering of the Virgilian scene through its prior imitation in Corneille's *Polyeucte*, in which Paulina tries to restrain her husband as he leaves her to go to his martyrdom.

³⁰ On *The Dispensary* see Ackerman (1979). On eighteenth-century English mock heroic and burlesque see Bond (1932); Broich (1990).

glorious aim, | His life should be as lasting as his fame”. William III is praised as a prince of both military conquest and peace, in the very Virgilian language of “cosmic whiggism”, as Philip Connelly puts it³¹ – or *cosmos and imperium*, as I put it – language frequently found in panegyric of William III and Queen Anne. Harvey calls for the celebration in song of William’s “God-like pow’r, | Which did the lab’ring universe restore; | Fair Albion’s cliffs wou’d echo to the strain, | And praise the arm that conquered, to regain | The earth’s repose, and empire o’er the main” (6.363–7). Harvey wishes that William should be borne skywards by Jove’s eagle late in time, to become a star, the close neighbour of the apotheosed Hercules. Hercules is a comparandum for Anchises’ Augustus, and frequently used in the political iconography of William III. But, as a constitutional monarch and hero of British liberties, William outdoes the Julian *gens* which forms the climax of the Virgilian Parade of Heroes: “Had some famed patriot, of the Latin blood, | Like Julius great, and like Octavius good, | But thus preserved the Latian liberties, | Aspiring columns soon had reached the skies: | Loud Io’s the proud Capitol had shook, | And all the statues of the gods had spoke” (6.378–83).

Virgil’s Parade of Heroes looks to an end of Roman history in the distant future, but the *Aeneid* has another six books to run before the war in Latium comes to an end. Garth’s battle between the Physicians and the Apothecaries has already taken place at the end of Canto 5. This is another non-lethal battle in mock-heroic mode – to sing of it Garth looks to “the Muse that sung the frogs in arms” (5.232), the *Batrachomyomachia*. The weapons are the instruments of the medical trade: caustics, emetics, cathartics, syringes, gallypots and phials. The climactic encounter is between Stentor, leader of the Physicians, and the anti-dispensarian physician Querpo, in a replay of the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus. Stentor falls, and supplicates Querpo, who is on the point of yielding to pity, until “He spy’d *Signetur*³² writ upon his breast” (340), and is “fired with more than mortal fury”. But the Virgilian ending is cancelled by a final swerve from epic sublimity into something that smacks more of travesty than of mock heroic, in the closing lines of the Canto (5.349–62):

With that he drew a lancet in his rage,
 To puncture the still supplicating sage. 350
 But while his thoughts that fatal stroke decree,
 Apollo interposed in form of fee.
 The chief great Pæan’s golden tresses knew,
 He owned the god, and his raised arm withdrew.

³¹ Connelly (2016).

³² “Let it be labelled”, in prescribing a medicine. Cf. *Aen.* 12.944, *umeris inimicum insigne gerebat*.

Thus often at the Temple-Stairs we've seen 355
 Two Tritons of a rough athletic mien,
 Sourly dispute some quarrel of the flood,
 With knuckles bruised, and face besmeared in blood;
 But at the first appearance of a fare,
 Both quit the fray, and to their oars repair. 360

The hero so his enterprise recalls,
 His fist unclines, and the weapon falls.

I have left until last the three greatest examples of English mock heroic: Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, first published in 1682, which may claim to be the first fully formed English mock heroic poem, indebted to Boileau's *Le Lutrin* published just eight years previously; and Pope's two masterpieces, *The Rape of the Lock* (1711 in two cantos, 1714 in five cantos) and *The Dunciad* (1728 in three books, 1743 in four books). To follow through the contribution of Virgil to the weave of these three poems in detail would take more than a lecture in itself, and I have time only for a few points.

The Rape of the Lock makes its Virgilian models³³ very clear in the opening Proposition and Invocation (1–6, 11–12):

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,
 What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
 I sing—This verse to Caryl, Muse! is due:
 This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view:
 Slight is the subject, but not so the praise, 5
 If she inspire, and he approve my lays.

In tasks so bold, can little men engage,
 And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?

Lines 5–6 are an adaptation of *Georgics* 4.6–7, *in tenui labor; at tenuis non gloria, si quem | numina laeua sinunt auditque uocatus Apollo* (see above). Tillotson points out that Pope's phrasing judiciously takes elements from two translations of the *Georgics*.³⁴

³³ On the use of Virgil in *The Rape of the Lock* see Rudat (1976).

³⁴ Tillotson (1954) *ad loc.*

Charles Sedley (1639–1701), “The subject’s humble, **but not so the praise**, | If any Muse assist the poet’s **lays**”; and Dryden, “**Slight is the subject**, but the praise not small, | If heav’n assist, and Phoebus hear my call”. This is comparable to the procedure of Dryden (and other translators) in appropriating and improving on the phrasing of previous translators. And, once again, we are reminded of the affinity between the work of the translator and that of the producer of travesty or mock epic. Line 11 continues the programmatic contrast of *Georgics* 4 of great and small (“In tasks so bold”, “little men”), a contrast continued in the following line 12, in the opposition between “soft bosoms” and “mighty rage”, but now transposed into an obvious imitation of the summing-up phrase, or *epiphonema*, of the prologue to the *Aeneid*, *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* (1.12), which had previously been adapted in one of the main modern models for *The Rape of the Lock*, Boileau’s *Le Lutrin*, 1.12 (the same line number): “Tant de fiel entre-t-il dans l’âme des devots?”³⁵

Pope returns at the very end to the claim for fame, as the trivial lock of hair, and its trivial separation from the head of its bearer, is set in the perspectives of the finality of death, of the vastness of celestial time, and of the immortality of fame (5.141–50):

Then cease, bright Nymph! to mourn thy ravished hair,
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!
Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost.
For, after all the murders of your eye, 145
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
And ’midst the stars inscribe Belinda’s name. 150

Tillotson notes “The external history of the poem has been one of universal fame”.³⁶ *At tenuis non gloria* indeed. The catasterism of Belinda’s lock is compared explicitly to the Lock of Berenice (“Not Berenice’s locks first rose so bright”, 5.129), but Pope, I think, is also aware of Virgil’s allusion to the Lock of Berenice at the end of *Aeneid* 4, when Iris cuts off a lock of the dying Dido’s hair to release her from her death struggles. *The Rape of the Lock*

³⁵ Ozell is further from the Virgilian model: “How heavenly breasts with human passions beat!”

³⁶ Tillotson (1954) 105.

is another example of the mock heroic in which battle fury does not lead to (literal) death. In the final combat between the beauties and their admirers the “incensed” Belinda “drew a deadly bodkin from her side”, to dispatch the Baron, but the *coup de grâce* is forestalled by the discovery that the lock has disappeared, so removing the prize for which the battle is being fought. That second removal of the lock provides the comic closure that replaces *Aeneid* 4’s resolution of the tragic story of Dido with the removal of her lock. Intermittent allusions to the story of Dido punctuate the previous narrative: the first two lines of Canto 4 recast the first two lines of *Aeneid* 4, “But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed, | And secret passions laboured in her breast”. Her cares are for her “ravished hair”, not the cares that arise for Dido after her ravishment in the cave. Dido sighs that she would have been all too happy if the Trojan ships had never put to shore in Carthage: *felix, heu nimium felix, si litora tantum | numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae ...* (*Aen.* 4.657–8). Pope’s Belinda sighs, “Happy! ah ten times happy had I been, | If Hampton-Court these eyes had never seen!” (4.149–50), where her “fav’rite curl” was snatched away. But the event for which Belinda grieves was not entirely trivial, if it is true, as Pope claims, that he was prevailed upon to write *The Rape of the Lock* to heal the estrangement that had arisen between the families of the Fermors and the Petres, when Robert, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor’s hair. The incident “was taken too seriously”, and Pope “wr[o]te a poem to make a jest of it, and laugh them together again” – in the event, not entirely successfully. Slighted honour looms large among early eighteenth-century landed families, as it did in Dido’s Carthage.

Succession and empire, two central themes of the *Aeneid*, structure the plots of *Mac Flecknoe* and *The Dunciad*. Dryden’s satire on his literary opponent Thomas Shadwell tells of Shadwell’s succession to Richard Flecknoe in the empire of Nonsense and Dullness. The Roman analogy is established in the opening lines: “All human things are subject to decay, | And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey: | This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young | Was called to empire, and had governed long”. The central scene of succession draws on Virgilian passages in *Aeneid* 2 and 12, which put the spotlight on the figure for Julian succession, Aeneas’ son Ascanius (108–11):³⁷

At his right hand our young Ascanius sate,
Rome’s other hope, and pillar of the state;
His brows thick fogs, instead of glories, grace,
And lambent dullness played around his face.

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³⁷ *Aen.* 2.682–4; 12.168, *et iuxta Ascanius, magnae spes altera Romae.*

Pope places the plot, such as it is, within larger perspectives, Miltonic as well as Virgilian. ‘Martinus Scriblerus’ identifies the “one, great and remarkable action”, demanded of *The Dunciad* as of any self-respecting epic, as “the restoration of the reign of Chaos and Night, by the ministry of Dullness their daughter, in the removal of her imperial seat from the City to the polite world; as the action of the *Aeneid* is the restoration of the empire of Troy by the removal of the race from thence to Latium”. This *translatio imperii* is set within universal time, since it was in a Hesiodic “eldest time” when Dullness “ruled, in native Anarchy, the mind”, in the “old Empire” that she now seeks to restore (1.16–17). This is also another kind of mythological renewal: in the opening prayer-like address to Jonathan Swift, Swift is invited to “behold [Dullness’s] mighty wings out-spread | To hatch a new Saturnian age of lead” (1.27–8), welding the Virgilian theme of the return of the golden age of Saturn under Augustus on to the Miltonic image of the Holy Spirit who “with mighty wings outspread | Dove-like sat’st brooding on the vast abyss | And mad’st it pregnant” (*PL* 1.20–2).

At the end of *The Dunciad*, the stage of the world is returned to the chaos out of which it was created: “Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos, is restored; | Light dies before thy uncreating word: | Thy hand, great anarch! lets the curtain fall; | And universal darkness buries All” (4.653–6). There are Shakespearean, Miltonic, and Iliadic notes in these strangely powerful lines. The “fall” / “all” rhyme is found in Dryden’s translation of Hector’s prediction of the fall of Troy in *Iliad* 6: “And yet my mind forebodes, with sure presage, | That Troy shall perish by the Grecian rage: | The fatal day draws on, when I must fall; | And universal ruin cover all” (“The last parting of Hector and Andromache”, 114–17). Dryden’s second couplet is in fact an addition to the Homeric original, in the gap between lines 449 and 450 of *Iliad* 6 (448–50): ἔσσεται ἡμᾶρ ὅτ’ ἂν ποτ’ ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρή | καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἔϋμμελίω Πριάμοιο. | ἀλλ’ οὐ μοι Τρώων τόσσον μέλει ἄλγος ὀπίσσω... (“There will be a day when sacred Ilios shall perish, and Priam and the people of Priam of the fine ash spear. But the pain of the Trojans hereafter is not so much a care to me...”). The suggestion that the fall of the city will lead to universal ruin strikes a more Virgilian than Homeric note, since the *Aeneid* works with an analogy between city-founding and cosmogony, the analogy that is reversed in Lucan’s equation of the collapse of Rome, consequent on civil war, with the end of the world.

By ending with allusion to Dryden, Pope marks himself as a successor to Dryden, hinting at a continuation of the cultural and poetic values for which Dryden stood, a kind of *translatio studii*, not the least important part of which is the maintenance of that living rootedness in the traditions of Greece and Rome, of which Dryden’s Homeric and Virgilian translations are evergreen monuments. More particularly, *The Dunciad* is a successor to Dryden’s *Mac Flecknoe*. Mock epic poets are as conscious of themselves as successors and rivals to their

predecessors as are the serious epic poets about whom I wrote many years ago in *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (1993). And not just mock epic poets; we have seen that the writers of travesties also proclaim themselves as working in a succession. This was a tradition that continued: the author of a Homeric travesty, *A new and accurate translation of the first book of Homer's Iliad* (Dublin, 1749), goes under the pseudonym of Henry Fitzcotton, “son of Cotton” who wrote *Scarronides*, “the son of Scarron”.

Is this a mockery, or travesty, of the line of epic successors that stretches from Homer to Milton, or is it a seriously meant statement of poetic pretension? As often, when we are dealing with mock epic or travesty, the answer seems to lie somewhere in between.

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